



Clark County Health Department Fact Sheet

Keep Food Safe During Power Outages

How can a power outage cause problems with my food?

Power outages can affect refrigeration and safe cooking practices. More than 250 diseases can be caused by bacteria found in contaminated raw or undercooked food, such as meat, milk, eggs, fish or shellfish. Proper storage and cooking of these foods can help prevent foodborne illness.

Can I do anything to protect myself before the power outage begins?

Yes. If you know or think that your power will be out for an extended a period of time, use foods that can spoil rapidly before those that keep longer. Find out now where you can buy dry ice to extend the life of your freezer, or blocks of ice for the refrigerator. Purchase an ice chest.

How can I keep food cold?

Keep doors to refrigerators and freezers closed to conserve cold air. Freezers that are part of a refrigerator-freezer combination will keep food frozen for up to a day. A free-standing chest or upright freezer will keep food frozen solid for two days if it is fully loaded. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for a day, especially if the food has been grouped together.

What if the power outage lasts more than one day?

An ice chest packed with ice or snow can keep food cold. It is most important to keep meat, seafood and dairy products cold. Purchase dry ice from a local ice company to save frozen food. Do not handle dry ice with your bare hands or use it on refrigerator foods, it is too cold. For the refrigerator, purchase block ice from a local ice company or bags of ice at a convenience store.

What if I can't get everything into my ice chest?

It is most important to keep meat, seafood and dairy products cold. In cool weather, other items can be stored in a cardboard box in a garage or shed. Generally, the following items can be kept on a countertop or in the garage:

- jams and jellies
- butter and margarine
- ketchup, mustard, pickles, relish and similar condiments
- fresh fruit and vegetables

It's winter. Can I store food outside?

No. The outside temperature varies from hour to hour. The sun may thaw frozen foods or warm refrigerator foods enough to grow bacteria. The outside temperature also is not suitable for both refrigerator and freezer foods. If it is 25 degrees Fahrenheit, it is too cold for refrigerator foods but not cold enough for frozen food. Food stored outside may also be contaminated by animals.

How can I tell if food is safe?

If food is cold to touch, and you know it has not been above 45 degrees Fahrenheit for more than an hour or two, it is probably safe to keep, use or refreeze. Discard all meat, seafood, dairy products or cooked food that does not feel cold to the touch. Even under proper refrigeration, many raw foods should be kept only two to three days before they are cooked, frozen or thrown away. If in doubt, throw it out. Never taste suspect food. It may look and smell fine, even though the bacteria that cause foodborne illness is present.

Where can I get more information?

Call the Clark County Health Department at (360) 397-8428.

